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FREE EAST TIMOR JAPAN COALITION

STATEMENT BY FREE EAST TIMOR JAPAN COALITION
TO THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF 24

27 JULY 1992

I wish to express my gratitude to the Chairperson for the opportunity to address this distinguished committee on the issue of East Timor.

Every year at this time in the summer the Japanese people call to mind the inhumanity of war, particularly the cruel acts committed by Japanese soldiers in the areas occupied by Japanese forces in the Far East and Southeast Asia. Although almost half a century has gone by, Japan cannot forget the crimes it committed in that war, crimes for which it will never be able to atone. Our involvement, as Japanese, in the East Timor issue stems from our reflection on our own past as invaders in that cruel war half a century ago.

This year, we in Japan have been reminded particularly of the female victims of Japan's aggression, the women throughout Asia who were forced to sexually service Japanese soldiers, euphemistically called "jugun ianfu" or "comfort women." During the three and a half years that Japan occupied East Timor, Timorese women too were violated in this way, as one ex-soldier had the courage to publicly confess.(1) This system of forced prostitution of Asian women is a deep disgrace to Japan, and the Japanese Government will be obliged to make an official apology. That it took more than forty-five years for this dark and shameful history to be exposed to the light of day is due in part to the fact that it is an issue very painful for the women victims themselves to speak about.

But let us turn now to the present and the fact that the territory of East Timor is once again under military occupation and has been for seventeen long years. We know that, at the very least, there are 10,000 Indonesian soldiers stationed there at any given time. Although according to official Indonesian statements the ostensible mission of these soldiers is no less noble-sounding than was that of their Japanese predecessors almost fifty years ago, they are in fact an occupying army which is, in the absence of any international monitoring presence whatsoever, completely free to pillage, rape, or otherwise abuse a defenseless population. It does not take much imagination to understand the plight of the women of East Timor, particularly in the rural areas, under this occupation.

Rape and other forms of sexual torture by Indonesian troops has been a constant element in the reports of human rights abuses

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in East Timor over the years, and the situation does not seem to have improved in recent times. A female traveler to East Timor testified before the UN Human Rights Commission's Subcommission on Racial Discrimination and Minorities that she heard many stories of rape during the days she spent in the territory. She learned too that the Catholic sisters are inundated with requests to join the convent from Timorese girls who see in the religious life their only hope of sanctuary and protection.(2)

Although we do not know how widespread the practice is, from a photograph we received in 1987 showing young Timorese village girls accompanying Indonesian soldiers on patrol in the mountains, we fear that the Indonesian soldiers may have their own version of the jugun ianfu system in East Timor.

School girls have been raped in their school, as in the September 1988 case of five students at the agricultural college at Natarbora who were raped and murdered by Indonesian soldiers.(3)

A man who fled East Timor and later came to Japan to plead the cause of his people told us of his own experience of the perverse practices of the occupying troops. After being arrested, he said, "I was taken to the San Tai How building where they tortured me just because they could not make the 8 millimeter projector they robbed at my home work. They ordered me to make it work and to play pornographic films, while they, that whole day, raped three women, namely one young girl and two ladies, after they forced them to see the films." (4)

The suffering of the women of East Timor is one of the deepest tragedies of the war and occupation and a serious affront to human dignity. Even if for no other reason than this, theinternational community should act quickly to bring about an end to Indonesia's occupation of East Timor.

For seventeen years, largely due to the influence of several big powers who preferred to turn a blind eye, the international community remained in ignorance of the travesty of justice taking place in East Timor. Contrary to their hopes, however, the problem did not go away. The wounds go deeper every year, the social distortion more ugly, not only in East Timor, but in Indonesia as well.

Can this Committee not do more to facilitate a solution? If I may be permitted to suggest a concrete course of action, it would be that the Special Committee of 24 present a recommendation to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly urging it to call on all member states to exert their best efforts to bring about the early commencement of peace talks between Indonesia, Portugal and representatives of the East Timorese.

Events in recent years have caused the world to look to the

United Nations with fresh expectations. I trust that the distinguished members of this committee will carefully consider every means at their disposal to mobilize the political willamong member states to bring about a solution to the East Timor issue in the very near future.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Footnotes

1. Asahi Shimbun, 7 August, 1991

2. Testimony given to the Subcommission in 1991 by Claire Calascione. Her testimony also echoes another recurring theme: men who protest the rape of their women folk are often killed. In one village this traveler visited she learned that the village chief's niece had been gang raped by soldiers, and that after the chief went to their officer to protest, the soldiers returned to the village and killed three young men in reprisal. Other recent examples of sexual violence are published in "East Timor: Repression and Resistance" by the Portuguese NGO Peace Is Possible In East Timor, 1991.

3. Sydney Morning Herald, 31 October, 1988

4. Testimony by Joao Maria dos Reis, 1989